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Corporate Social Responsibility: More Important than You Think

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Despite the numerous advantages of capitalism, some people still view it as an inherently oppressive ideology which fosters the disenfranchisement of women, minority groups, and working-class communities. Although it is an imperfect system which cannot resolve

all social inequities, the emphasis that it places on a meritocracy can increase the participation of groups which have historically been marginalized by the ruling political class (Chen 1). The phenomenon of Corporate Social Responsibility, which emphasizes the importance of a socially conscious ethos, is becoming increasingly prevalent in companies (Chen 1). The purpose of this essay is not to argue that capitalism, on its own, can rectify social injustice. Instead, I believe that in cohesion with an efficient government, which protects the rights of its citizens, it can be an effective tool to promote social change. Despite the progress that we have made in the past century, racism, sexism and ableism, still prevent ordinary Canadians from achieving their professional goals. In order to promote greater social inclusivity, since 1989, AIM CROIT 1, has provided free employment services to thousands of Montrealers with sensory, neurological, and physical disabilities (Eustache). With help from AIM CROIT's staff, namely its interim general manager, Ms. Nadine Eustache, this article will demonstrate the concrete financial, social, and cultural benefits of a more inclusive corporate environment.

Note: As of September 4th 2020, Francisca Elgueta is AIM CROIT's executive director and as of October 5th 2020, Christina Cobein has returned as team leader.



AIM CROIT

CENTRE DE RÉADAPTATION, D'ORIENTATION
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Addressing Ableism

One of the primary advantages of a more inclusive workplace environment is that it allows

companies to benefit from a larger group of talented professionals. According to the CCPA (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives), as of July 2018, the unemployment rate for people with mild disabilities was 35% compared to about 5.8% for the rest of the population (Raso 1). Employment counsellor and interim team leader, Ms. Alexandra Laurent, attributes the shocking 29% difference to the additional challenges that people with disabilities may face while searching for employment.

“As employment counsellors, we need to constantly work to combat the prejudices that some employers have against people with disabilities. Sometimes, the things that I hear employers say about people with disabilities sound a bit abhorrent to me,” said Laurent solemnly.

During my interview with Laurent, she explained that the pervasive myth that there are prohibitive costs associated with workplace accommodations is one of the main factors which prevents organizations from hiring people with disabilities. However, according to a study conducted by the US jobs accommodation Network, 57% of participants spent nothing at all on workplace accommodations and the typical costs were only a one-time expenditure of \$500 (Rethinking Disability 8). Organizations like AIM CROIT can also help people with disabilities apply for government subsidies to offset the initial workplace accommodation costs for their employer (Eustache). Depending on the severity of the condition, in Quebec, these subsidies can cover between 20-80% of a person's salary (Laurent). If necessary, AIM CROIT will also help clients with hearing impairments get reimbursed for services like LSQ (Langue des signes quebecoise) interpreters (Laurent).

A common stereotype that people with disabilities encounter when searching for employment is the belief that their condition will make them less productive employees. The findings, in a study by DuPont, contradict these claims by demonstrating that 90% of people with disabilities had an average or above average job performance (Rethinking Disability 8). Moreover, according to Joe Dale, the former executive director of The Ontario Disability Employment Network, there is evidence that people with disabilities have lower rates of absenteeism and are more loyal employees (Ahmed-Haq 1).

“The Pizza Hut/Taco Bell study showed that workers who have disabilities were five times more likely to stay on the job than their non-disabled cohort,” he explained for an article published in CBC news (Ahmed-Haq 1).

According to Laurent, because of the additional challenges that people with disabilities face in the labour market, they are much less likely to leave the organization for which they are working.

“A large percentage of people with disabilities are capable of working,” said Eustache. “Once they find a job where their employer respects their limitations, they will be so proud to be working that they will always be motivated to continue,” she explained.

From a financial perspective, according to Rich Donovan, founder of Fifth Quadrant Analytics, companies that are more inclusive towards people with disabilities do better and often have higher revenue growth (Rethinking Disability 8). To support this argument, he cites Tim Hortons franchisee Megleen Inc., which includes people with disabilities in all aspects of the business (Rethinking Disability 14). Megleen's turnover rate is 35 percent compared to the industry average, which is 75 percent (Rethinking Disability 14). In 2011, the absenteeism rate among workers with disabilities at this organization was zero (Rethinking Disability 14). Marriot also reported a low 6 percent turnover rate among workers with disabilities, compared to 52 percent overall (Rethinking Disability 14).

Despite the many challenges that people with disabilities still encounter, the thousands of

Montrealers that AIM CROIT has helped, demonstrates that, in many cases, it is possible for them to achieve their goals (Eustache). During my experience as a communications intern for the organization, I was truly inspired by the tenacious and optimistic attitude of AIM CROIT's clients. No matter what obstacles were placed in their way, they continued to work hard to achieve their professional goals.

American businesswoman and Shark Tank investor, Barbara Corcoran, exemplifies their perseverant spirit (Locke 1). Despite suffering from dyslexia as a child, she managed to turn a small 1000\$ loan into a 66-million-dollar real estate empire (Locke 3).

"My teachers and classmates constantly calling me dumb only made me more determined to prove myself...I worked harder than anyone to overcome my 'weakness' and it's a large part of my success," said Corcoran (Locke 3).

Women in the Workforce

Although we have made remarkable strides in promoting women's rights in the past century, women still face many additional professional challenges. For example, although women represent approximately 50% of the population in Canada as of July 2018, only about 3.3% of TSX-listed Canadian companies had a female CEO (Catalyst 3). Furthermore, 30% of corporations reported having only one female executive (Catalyst 3). In addition to fostering greater social equity, providing women with more professional opportunities can be very financially lucrative for companies (Mulshine 1). For example, according to Shark Tank investor Kevin O'Leary:

"One thing's for sure: We should be elevating women to the CEO position because we're getting better returns... You don't need another reason in business. In my case, the numbers speak for themselves," (Mulshine 7).

Of the 27 companies in his portfolio, an astounding 55% have a female CEO (Mulshine 3). Moreover, O'Leary also boasted that 95 percent of the women led companies met their objectives compared to only 65% of the ones with male leaders (Canal 1). O'Leary attributes these impressive results to three main factors: better time management skills, more realistic goals, and superior listening skills (Montag 1).

"I don't have a single company run by a man right now that's outperformed the ones run by women," said O'Leary (Mulshine 3).

Although the wage gap has been shrinking, according to Statistics Canada, based on average hourly wages in 2018, full-time employed women earned \$0.87 for every dollar that men earned (Pelletier et al. 1). According to acclaimed psychology professor Jordan Peterson, an important factor which contributes to this gap is the different professional and personal choices that men and women make (Venker 1). Eustache also believes that women in the workforce are often more reluctant to negotiate a higher salary (Eustache). Peterson claims that this is because, on average, women are more agreeable than men (Friedersdorf 1).

Eustache believes that education is an extremely effective tool which can be used to increase the presence of women in fields, such as engineering, where they are underrepresented (Eustache). For example, she is a member of the *Association of Quebec Women in Finance (AFFQ)*, which provides women with access to important professional and networking opportunities (Eustache).

"It is important to encourage women to enter sectors where they are underrepresented.



Some women lack the confidence to do this and do not believe they are capable,” said Eustache.

Inclusivity

Luckily, there is legislation in Quebec which exists to protect minority groups, LGBTQ people and religious minorities from discrimination. Although Eustache has never personally experienced any racial prejudices in a professional setting, she acknowledges that discrimination is still a problem for many other members of the Black community. For example, according to Statistics Canada, the Caucasian population, in Canada, still has a higher employment rate than the Black population (Canada’s Black population 8). Eustache believes that increasing employment rates and providing more economic opportunities, for Black-Canadians, will have many positive effects for the community.

For example, she explains that: “Increasing the purchasing power in the Black communities can lead to greater self-confidence,” (Eustache).

Unconscious bias is a major issue which can limit the professional opportunities of racial and sexual minorities. According to Randstad, 88% of white people hold a pro-white bias and 83% of straight people unconsciously favour straight people over LGBTQ+ people (Randstad 1). Since these biases are unconscious, combating them will be extremely difficult. However, acknowledging that they exist allows us to think more carefully about what type of language we use in a professional setting and how some aspects of our conduct might be perceived as offensive. It is especially important, for people in positions of power, to think carefully about whether they have been treating all their employees fairly.

“Because of the existing prejudices, it may be harder for some people to enter the workforce. Diversity is not just about increasing the number of women. Every culture has something unique to contribute,” Eustache explained.

In accordance with these statements, Randstad advises that it is important to: “step outside your echo chamber to hear opinions and ideas that will force you to challenge the status quo,” (Randstad 1). Ultimately, only companies with dynamic ideas will be able to successfully compete in the marketplace. According to Eustache, a culturally diverse workplace environment is also socially advantageous, since it forces individuals with bigoted views to confront their prejudices. Moreover, it is very likely that employees will be much less loyal and productive if they perceive the organization they are working for as unethical.

“When hiring people, it is important for companies not to hold onto their prejudices and to remain open-minded about what the candidate can bring to your organisation,” said Eustache enthusiastically.

AIM CROIT’s commitment to protecting women’s rights is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the organization’s employees are female (Eustache). The demographics of the organization’s employees also accurately represent the diversity present in Quebec society (Eustache). Although their mission is to assist people with disabilities, the employment counsellors at AIM CROIT strive to protect their clients from any type of unfair discrimination (Eustache).

Fortunately, Corporate Social Responsibility seems to be becoming an increasingly prevalent part of Canadian society. Because of this, Eustache is hopeful that in the future, nearly all organizations will strive to maintain a socially conscious ethos.



“In the future, I hope that we will no longer need to talk about the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility, because all organizations will naturally be equitable, inclusive and diverse,” said Eustache emphatically.

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